

## THE COMING GREAT TRIBULATION

### ***Unless Those Days Had Been Cut Short, No Life Would Have Been Saved!***

The Revelation of John is jam-packed with apocalyptic imagery. The Gospels, 1 Thessalonians, and the Old Testament are also filled with end times information. Through the lens of all these Bible books, the purpose of the Great Tribulation is brought into focus. If you have ever wondered how you will be personally touched during this end time period, the cornerstone of this article highlights how we are all affected.

As a *former* 18 year member of the cult organization called the Watchtower, the Great Tribulation was largely just another brainwashing doom and gloom tool used to keep members in fear and under their control. We never truly understood the subject. Therefore, I am dedicating this article to those who have left the Organization.

The year 1914 was another mind control tactic. According to the Watchtower, Christ returned in that year to begin His rule as King. Looking back and remembering how I swallowed their dogma, hook, line, and sinker, it reminds me of the Hans Christian Andersen story. The story of two weavers making *invisible new clothes* for the Emperor. As the Emperor struts his new clothes, no one dares to say that he is naked out of fear that they may be seen as incompetent or stupid. In like manner, members of the Watchtower never questioned the 1914 *invisible* return of Christ for fear that they would also be looked at unfavorably. The *invisible return of Christ* is their cornerstone doctrine. Actually, doubting any of their dogma comes at a high price.

The Hans Christian Andersen story can also be applied to some within the Body of Christ in our 21st century. Full Preterist advocates, along with many Partial Preterists, reject the Watchtower cult version of Christ's invisible return in 1914, but do embrace an A.D. 70 *invisible* return. Both views are untenable to this Christian, but ironically, because the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ are inherently linked, analyzing our Tribulation topic will also include Christ's Second Advent.

## Interpreting Scripture 101

### ***What Method To Use***

The most important aspect of biblical interpretation is context, context, context. It is the key to understanding the meaning of a text. However, there are other methods under the heading of hermeneutics (the art and science of biblical interpretation) which also need to be considered, for example: Literal, Spiritual, Moral, Allegorical, and Anagogical. We can also use the Symbolic, Figurative or Metaphorical. The question before us is what method to use? To answer that question I quote Dr. Charles C. Ryrie, "Literal interpretation is the only safe method of interpretation." Among all the methods that can be used, Dr. Ryrie recommends the literal. He does so because it is the safest among all the rest. In other words, the literal approach means to take the words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or allegory. Therefore, this article will apply the literal method of interpretation to the biblical passages and texts.

## **The Offices of Jesus Christ**

### ***Prophet, Priest, and King***

“Christ holds three offices: prophet, priest, and king. However, He does not function in all these offices simultaneously. Rather, the functioning of these three offices is to be carried out in chronological sequence. During His ministry on earth at His first coming, Christ functioned in His office of a prophet. However, this ceased at the time of His death. Since His death and resurrection, and until He returns, Christ is functioning in His office of a priest. This duty will cease at the second coming of Christ. Jesus has never yet functioned in His office of a king. For Him to do so, there must be the re-establishment of the Davidic throne, upon which Christ will sit to rule as king over Israel and king of the world. The duty will begin at the second coming.” *Israelology*, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum Th.M., Ph.D. pg. 804, par. 1

“In the New Testament, the re-establishment of the Davidic throne is found in Luke 1:32-35. All four key aspects of the Davidic Covenant are mentioned here. The Son of Mary is to sit upon the eternal throne over an eternal kingdom, for He was born into the eternal dynasty. The eternalness of the dynasty, throne, and kingdom is assured because they all culminate in the Person who is Himself eternal: the Son of God.” *Israelology*, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum Th.M., Ph.D. pg 805, par. 4

“Psalm 89 is totally devoted to this theme. In this passage, God states that He has made an eternal covenant with David (v.3), including the establishment of an eternal dynasty and an eternal throne (v.4). The eternalness of the dynasty and the throne is restated later in verse 29. Still later, in verses 34-37, David states that the continuation of the covenant is not dependent upon David or upon his descendants, but upon God’s character (v.34). Since God does not lie, the covenant is sure to stand (v. 35). For that very reason, the eternalness of the dynasty and the throne is assured (vv. 36-37).” *Israelology*, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum Th.M., Ph.D. pg 804, par. 2 (b)

### **Brief Summary**

- Literal Scriptural interpretation offers the safest method.
- Jesus Christ fulfilled His roles as prophet and priest.
- Jesus Christ’s role as King is yet to be fulfilled.

## **JEWISH HISTORIAN FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS**

Flavius Josephus is the most-recognized Jewish historian outside of the Bible. He was born 37/38 A.D. and died 100 A.D. He was a Jewish priest, scholar, and historian who wrote on the Jewish revolt of 66-70 and on earlier Jewish history. The desire of Flavius as an historian was to give an accurate account of history. (For example, he writes: “The deaths of Jews recorded by Josephus (War, VI. 9.3.) states that 1,100,000 perished and 97,000 were taken captive in A.D.

70.”) Flavius wrote in meticulous detail outlining every nuance. I know this because I possess his works.

“Those who undertake to write histories, do not, I perceive, take that trouble on one and the same account, but for many reasons, and those such as are very different one from another: for some of them apply themselves to this part of learning to show their skill in composition, and that they may therein acquire a reputation for speaking finely: other of them there are, who write histories in order to gratify those who happen to be concerned in them, and on that account have spared no pains, but rather gone beyond their own abilities in the performance: but other there are, who of necessity, and by force, are driven to write history, because they were concerned in the facts, and so cannot excuse themselves from committing them to writing, for the advantage of posterity; nay, there are not a few who are induced to draw their historical facts out of darkness into light, and to product them for the benefit of the public, on account of the great importance of the facts themselves with which they have themselves been concerned. Now of these several reasons for writing history, I must profess the two last were my own reasons also; for since I was myself interested in that war which we Jews had with the Romans, and knew myself its particular actions, and what conclusion it had, I was forced to give the history of it, because I saw that others perverted the truth of those actions in their writings.” The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus The Historian, by William Whiston, A.M., under the heading, “Preface To Josephus.”

One example from The Complete Works Of Flavius Josephus The Jewish Historian, “Wars Of The Jews,” pg 568:

“As for John, he wanted food together with his brethren, in these caverns, and begged that the Romans would now give him their right hand for security, which he had often proudly rejected before: but for Simon, he struggled hard with the distress he was in, till he was forced to surrender himself, as we shall relate hereafter: so he was reserved for the triumph, and to be then slain; as was John condemned to perpetual imprisonment. And now the Romans set fire to the extreme parts of the city, and burnt them down, and entirely demolished its walls.”

There are thousands of examples of how Flavius used the smallest of details to paint a vivid and picturesque image for all to remember. His uncut versions gave the world a birds-eye view of the hopelessness, carnage, and despair. Considering that, Flavius took such great care in describing events in their minutest detail, this begs the question: If his desire was to report the facts accurately, examine the scenes and magnify every nuance and provide the world with an impeccable historical report ... would he have forgotten to report a once-in-a-life-time event?

“One looks in vain in Josephus’s account of the Jerusalem war for a distinct event that would stand out clearly as deserving the label ‘the desolating sacrilege.’” The Gospel of Matthew, The New Testament Greek Testament Commentary, by John Nolland, pg. 1146.

Significantly his writings omit the “sign” Christ gave at Matthew 24:15. Why?

## **The Silence of Flavius Josephus**

The silence of Flavius is a profound happenstance. Whether he knew of all the teachings of Christ is not at issue here. What is, however, is his omission, intended or forgetful, of a once-in-a-life time visual experience.

We will come back to the silence of Flavius, but first I want to share three relevant parallel gospel passages, along with Daniel 9 and the Matthew 24:21 text by Greek scholar Dr. Spiros Zodhiates:

*“For those days will be a time of tribulation such as had not occurred since the beginning of creation which God created until now, and never will.”* Mark 13:19

*“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”* Matthew 24:21

*“and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”* Luke 21:24

*“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”* Daniel 9:27

Jesus Christ compares all tribulations to the coming Great Tribulation. The “sign” or signal He provided at Matthew 24:15 would sound the alert and put everyone on notice of its imminent arrival. He also quantified its magnitude by using every historical tribulation the world had ever seen or will see. The book of Mark 13:19 reads this way: *“For those days will be a time of tribulation such as had not occurred **since the beginning of creation** which God created **until now, and never will.**”* (emphasis added)

Although all three gospel passages express it differently, they all refer to the same event. In helping us understand their literal meanings, I turn to Greek scholar Dr. Spiros Zodiates and his examination of Matthew 24:21, *“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has **not occurred since the beginning of the world** until now, **nor ever will.**”*

“The words ‘great’ and ‘tribulation,’ occurring without definite articles, should be taken generically, introducing us to a special kind of tribulation. ‘Such’ translates a form of the relative pronoun *hoios* (3634), such a one. The contrast that follows is between this and every other tribulation. This will be the severest. ‘To this time’ translates *heos* (2193), until this time. The last phrase, ‘no, nor ever shall be,’ begins with the negative *oude* (3761), ‘but not.’ This is a contrasting compound conjunction of the two negatives *ou* (3756) and *me* (3361) combined as an intensive combination, meaning absolutely not, never at any time. The intensive negative means that this tribulation will be absolutely unprecedented.” Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, by Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, pg 401 discussing Matthew 24:21.

As a recap, the Greek language separates and compares all prior tribulations to a “special kind of tribulation.” The tribulation contemplated here will be the severest of all others from the beginning of creation. “To this time,” is translated, “until this time,” and the last phrase, “no, nor ever shall be” means “absolutely not, never at any time.” Dr. Zodhiates concludes by saying, “The intensive negative means that this tribulation will be absolutely unprecedented.” The word “unprecedented” means never before known or experienced. What we will be looking for is a tribulation the world has never seen or experienced. Something terrible is coming.

Matthew Chapter 24 outlines specific events of the the last days. One of these is the Great Tribulation. The Second Coming of Christ is another. Some believe that everything Christ said came to fruition in the year A.D. 70. For the record, this Christian rejects that position. Nevertheless, many hold to that view. Our discussion, however, is primarily focused upon the words of Christ and their meaning. Was Christ referring to A.D. 70 when He said, “up until that time, or until this time?” The entire passage at Matthew 24:21 reads: *“for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.”*

If the Great Tribulation did materialize in A.D. 70, as we are assuming it did for purposes of discussion, was the destruction of Jerusalem the worst in human history and, therefore, unprecedented? The only way we are going to find the answer to that question is to compare all tribulations in history up until that time.

The time of Noah comes to my mind. That tribulation completely submerged our planet under water with only eight human souls surviving. We can definitely classify a world under water as unprecedented. What about wars? The conflicts of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medes and Persian, Greece, and of course the Roman empire. How would we classify these? The first world conflict could be seen as unprecedented (never before known or experienced). The rest, however, are just common occurrences. Consequently, the destruction of the Temple of Solomon in 587 BC by the Babylonian Empire would make the Jerusalem destruction by the Roman armies in A.D. 70 only a common occurrence. Therefore, comparing all tribulations up to A.D. 70, the Earth submerged under water would (and perhaps the first world conflict could) be labeled “unprecedented.”

Returning our attention to our Greek authority, he translated the Greek phrase “no, nor ever shall be” to mean “absolutely not, never at any time.” An analogy would be good here. The Valdivia earthquake, for example, registered a 9.4-9.6 on the Richter scale on May 22, 1960. It is the largest recorded quake in history, and is therefore classified as “unprecedented.” Unlike the Valdivia earthquake, however, where a greater quake could emerge, the Great Tribulation will be unprecedented *for all time*. So destructive that the words of Christ become even more ominous: *“Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved.”* Matthew 24:22 (a).

Before moving on I wanted to share something else. The deaths caused by the Great Tribulation will exceed the 1.1 million as recorded by Flavius Joseph in A.D. 70. It will also exceed the 70 million deaths during WWII. To put things into perspective, the deaths caused by the Roman Armies and WWII together are minuscule in comparison to what the Great Tribulation will harvest. I turn your attention to Revelation 9:14-15, *“one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ And the four angels, who had been prepared for*

*the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.”* The footnote of revelation 9:14-15 found in Dr. Charles Caldwell Ryrie Study Bible, pg. 1582, reads: “These four angels (demons) are released in order to kill one-third of the remaining population of the earth. Added to the one-fourth who were killed under the fourth seal judgment (6:4) these judgments alone destroy only half of the population, not including those who are killed by wars, famines, and disease. **the hour** (v 15). Lit., this particular hour.”

The deaths caused by the Great Tribulation will be unprecedented *for all time*. Billions of people will be killed. This brings me back to our Historian Flavius Josephus. There are no writings which detail the “sign” that Christ foretold, recorded at Matthew 24:15. He was silent. In lieu of what we now know, the reason for his silence is no longer a mystery. The “sign” or signal, alerting people of the imminency of the Great Tribulation, was never sounded. He could not write about something that didn't happen. The “sign” never appeared; therefore, he had nothing to write about. The silence of Flavius Josephus is just more proof against the idea the year A.D. 70 fulfilled all prophecy.

There is even more Scriptural testimony proving this point, found at Luke 21:24 (b):

*“... Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”*

“The period of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, which probably began under Nebuchadnezzar (587. B.C.), was certainly in effect in A.D. 70 and continues into the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 11:2).” The Ryrie NASB Study Bible pg. 1292, footnote on Luke 21:24

Revelation 11:2 reads: *“Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations, and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.”*

What exactly does the Gentile times, mean? It means the person ruling is not Jewish. God had Jewish kings ruling over the Nation of Israel, and when that ceased, other nations or gentiles began to rule. This was called the rule of the Gentiles or Gentile times. However, once the Gentile times are fulfilled (still future), a Jewish ruler will once again sit on God's earthly Throne. His name is Jesus Christ. These Scriptures provide additional evidence against the A.D. 70 narrative that “all Scripture was fulfilled in A.D 70.”

We now know that Gentile domination continues, as Luke 21:24 (b) opens the door to a future fulfillment beyond A.D. 70. If Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and Daniel 9 are all linked (which they are), and all speak of the same coming event (which they do), then the only tenable conclusion is they all culminate simultaneously (which they will). Therefore, all prophecy has not been fulfilled, which includes, but is not limited to, the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ.

Let me add one more thing before we continue. Many insist that the “generation” of Matthew 24:34, *“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place,”* refers to those that Christ was speaking with at the time. As we have already learned, the Great Tribulation did not manifest itself in the first century. Therefore, a future fulfillment is the only rational answer.

Consequently, in like manner, the “generation” He spoke of would also be the people who would see “all these things,” including the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ.

In closing, I quote Dr. Ryrie: “*this generation*. No one living when Jesus spoke these words lived to see “all these things” come to pass. However, the Greek word can mean ‘race’ or ‘family,’ which makes good sense here; i.e., the Jewish race will be preserved, in spite of terrible persecution, until the Lord comes.” The Ryrie NASB Study Bible, pg. 1213, footnote on Matthew 24:34.

### **Summary**

- Luke 21:24 (b) opens the door to a future fulfillment beyond A.D. 70.
- The Gentile Times and the Great Tribulation culminate simultaneously.
- Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, and Daniel 9 are all linked.
- Flavius went silent because the “sign” did not appear.

### **THE GREAT TRIBULATION BEGINS**

#### ***The “Sign” Flavius Josephus Did Not See***

“Therefore **when you see** the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.” Matthew 24:15-16 (The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible New American Standard Version, Spiro Zodhiates, Th.D.)

Dr. Ryrie comments: “ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION - This is the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:4), the Antichrist, who at this midpoint in the Tribulation breaks the covenant he made with the Jewish people at the beginning of the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27) and demands that they and the world worship him. Those who resist will be persecuted, and many will be martyred; that is the reason for the urgency of the instructions in verses 16-22.” The Ryrie NASB Study Bible, pg. 1212, footnote on Matthew 24:15.

“What did Christ mean by the expression ‘the abomination of desolation’? This term is found three times in the book of Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Its definition is found in Daniel 11:31 in the prophecy written by Daniel concerning a Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, who reigned over Syria 175-164 B.C., about four hundred years after Daniel. (footnote 25 - John F. Walvoord, Daniel, rev. and edited by Charles H. Dyer and Philip E. Rawley (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 343-44.

In his prophecy, Daniel predicted, ‘Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate’ (11:31). As this was fulfilled in history, it is comparatively easy to understand what Daniel meant. Antiochus Epiphanes was a great persecutor of the people of Israel, as recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees and in Josephus. (footnote 26 - Josephus, Antiquities 12. 5.4.). In attempting

to stamp out the Jewish religion, he murdered thousands of Jews, including women and children, and desecrated the temple of Israel, which precipitated the Maccabean revolt.

Antiochus attempted to stop the temple sacrifices by offering an unclean sow on the altar, to render the temple abominable to the Jews (cf. 1 Macc. 1:48). According to Maccabees 1:57, the abomination of desolation was actually set up, and a statue of a Greek god was installed in the temple. For a time the Jewish sacrifices were stopped, and the temple was left desolate. The action of Antiochus in stopping the sacrifices, desecrating the temple, and setting up an idol in the temple is going to be repeated by another evil ruler in the future as the signal of the beginning of the great tribulation.

This future abomination is described in Daniel 9:27: 'And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.' The prediction is that a future prince will do just what Antiochus did in the second century B.C. Further light is cast on this in Daniel 12:11, where it states: 'And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there that be 1,290 days,' or approximately three-and-a-half years preceding the second coming of Christ.

Paul described the same period in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, which say this future ruler will set himself up as God in the temple. Revelation 13:14-15 also records that an image of the ruler will be set up in the temple. These events did not take place in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and await a future fulfillment just prior to the second coming of Christ.

These predictions have raised questions concerning the importance of Israel's present control over the city of Jerusalem. If sacrifices are going to be stopped in a Jewish temple in the future, it requires, first, that a Jewish temple be built, and second, that the sacrifices be reinstated. This has led to the conclusion that Israel's control of Jerusalem — in which the temple site is located — since 1967 may be a divinely ordered preparation, that in God's time, the temple will be built and the sacrifices begun again. The Dome of the Rock currently sits on the spot where Israel's ancient temple once stood, and it is hard to envision Israel seeking to inflame the Muslims by destroying the Dome of the Rock and building their temple on that spot. Nevertheless, the Bible clearly states that a temple will be built and these prophecies literally fulfilled. When that future temple is suddenly desecrated, it will constitute a sign to the nation of Israel of the coming time of great trouble that is to precede the second coming of Christ.

*"Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, 'Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.'" Revelation 11:2.*

The sign is so specific that on the basis of it, Christ advised those living in Judea to flee to the mountains without hesitation when it occurs. ... "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never

will be.’ Carson says that what Jesus is describing in verses 15-21 cannot refer to the future great tribulation because ‘the details in vv. 16-21 are too limited geographically and culturally to justify that view. (footnote 27 - Carson, Matthew, 499) However, Kasdan provides a satisfactory answer. ‘It is such an obvious Jewish context that is only understandable when applied to Israel and the Jewish people. In other words, Matthew 24 is largely dealing with writings to the latter-day generation of the Jewish community. (footnote 28 - Kasdan, Mathew, Presents Yeshua, 298)

The great tribulation is a specific period of time beginning with the abomination of desolation and closing with the second coming of Christ. Daniel identified the period as being forty-two months in length. Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 also identify the great tribulation as a specific three-and-a-half-year period that culminates in the second coming. This time period should not be confused with the general time of trouble described in Matthew 24:4-14. The fact that Jesus focuses on Judea, the Sabbath, and other Jewish elements at the start of this final forty-two month period can be explained by the dramatic event in Jerusalem that actually begins the great tribulation. Jerusalem becomes ‘ground zero’ for this act of satanic opposition to the plan and purpose of God for the Jewish people.

Jesus also predicted the period would be ‘cut short’ (v. 22), literally, terminated or cut off (Gr. *ekolobothesan*). This does not mean that the period will be less than three-and-a-half years, but that it will be definitely terminated by Christ’s second coming. That this period will be a time of unprecedented trouble is brought out clearly in the judgments of Revelation 6-19. For example, the fourth seal (Rev. 6:7-8) predicts one-fourth of the earth perishing. In Revelation 9:13-21, the sixth trumpet refers to a third of the world’s remaining population being killed. These are only two of the great catastrophes which fall one after another upon the world and which will climax in a great world war culminating in the gathering of the world’s armies at the hill of Megiddo — Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-169. The final judgment just before the second coming, described as the seventh bowl of wrath of God (Rev. 16:17-21), consists in a great earthquake that apparently destroys the cities of the world, and a hailstorm featuring stones that weigh as much as eighty pounds. Putting all these Scriptures together, it indicates that the great tribulation will mark the death of billions of people in a comparatively short period of time.” The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries, Matthew, by John F. Walvoord and Charles H. Dyer, pgs., 322-325.

### Summary

- A Future Temple ... “Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.’” Rev. 11:2
- Antichrist breaks the Seven Year Covenant with Israel; Revelation 12:11: “And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days,” approximately three-and-a-half years preceding the second coming of Christ.
- Billions Killed During the Great Tribulation.

## **THE GREAT TRIBULATION and THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

### ***When Will Christ Return?***

A comprehensive discussion regarding the events leading to Christ's return is found in Israelology, the Missing Link in Systematic Theology:

“The Rapture of the Church has no preconditions and can come at any moment. However, the second coming of Christ does have a major precondition that must be met before Christ will return to establish the Messianic Kingdom. The first passage is Leviticus 26:40-42:

*If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting hostility against Me— I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies — or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.*

In Leviticus 26, Moses predicted how, because of disobedience to God's revealed will, the Jews would be scattered all over the world. According to the New Testament, this came as a direct result of the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus. By verse 39, the world-wide dispersion is a fact. Up to this point, Leviticus 26 has been fulfilled. In verse 42, Moses states that God has every intention of giving to Israel all the blessings and promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, especially as the covenant pertains to the Promised Land. However, before they can begin to enjoy these blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant during the Messianic Kingdom, it is first necessary for them to fulfill the condition of verse 40: ... *they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers*. Something to notice is the word iniquity committed by the fathers and continued by them which Israel must confess before she can begin to enjoy all the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The second passage is Jeremiah 3:11-18. In verses 14-18, Jeremiah describes the blessings which God has in store for Israel in the Messianic Kingdom. It will be a time of tremendous blessing and restoration for the Jewish people when the kingdom is established by their Messiah. However, all of these blessings are conditioned by verse 13 where they must acknowledge or confess one specific iniquity which they committed against Jehovah their God.

The third passage is in the Book of Zechariah. Chapters 12-14 are a single unit of thought containing one prophecy God gave the prophet. Chapter 13 speaks of the national cleansing of Israel from their sin. Chapter 14 describes the second coming of the Messiah (vv. 1-15) and the establishment of the kingdom (vv. 16-21). However, the cleansing of Israel followed by the second coming of Christ and the Messianic Kingdom are all conditioned on Zechariah 12:10:

*I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.*

Before Israel will receive the cleansing of her sin, and before Christ will return to establish His kingdom, Israel must first look *unto* the One whom they have pierced and must plead for His return. Once they do this, then, and only then, will they receive their cleansing and begin to enjoy the blessings of the Messianic Age.

The fourth passage is in Hosea five. The One who is doing the speaking throughout the chapter is God Himself, and God is still speaking in verse 15:

*I will go away and return to My place Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.*

There are certain presuppositions behind the understanding of this verse. Before anyone can return to a place, he must first leave it. In this passage God states that He is going to return to His place. God's place is heaven. Before God can return to heaven, He must first leave it. God left heaven at the incarnation when He became man, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Then, because of one specific offense committed against Him, He returned to heaven at the ascension from the Mount of Olives. This verse further states that He will not come back to earth until the offense that caused Him to return to heaven is acknowledged or confessed. The nation Jewish offense committed against the person of Jesus is not, as so many people think, in killing Him. The actual killing of Christ was done by Gentiles, not Jewish, hands. He was condemned and sentenced by a Gentile judge. He was crucified by Gentile soldiers. All this is ultimately irrelevant, for regardless of Jewish acceptance or Jewish rejection, Jesus would have had to die anyway to become the sacrifice for sin. The national offense of Israel was in the rejection of His messiahship. According to this verse, only when this offense is acknowledge or confessed will Christ come back to the earth.

The fifth passage is in Matthew 23 which contains Christ's denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish leadership of that day, for leading the nation in the rejection of His messiahship. He was still speaking to them in verses 37-39:

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.'*

Speaking to the Jewish leadership, Christ reiterated His original desire to gather them if they would only accept Him (v. 37). Because of their rejection of His messiahship, in place of being gathered they are going to be scattered. Their *house*, the Jewish Temple, will be left *desolate* and will be destroyed with nothing remaining (v. 38). He then declares that they will not see Him again until they say, *Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord* (v. 39). This is a quotation of a messianic Psalm, Psalm 118:26.

Jesus will not come back to the earth until the Jews and the Jewish leaders ask Him to come back. Just as the Jewish leaders led the nation to the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus, they must some day lead the nation to the acceptance of the Messiahship of Jesus. This, then, is the twofold basis of the second coming of Christ: Israel must confess her national sin and then plead for Messiah to return, to *mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son*. Until these two things happen, there will be no second coming.

... The second facet leading to the second coming is the pleading of Israel for the Messiah to return and save them from the world armies intent on their destruction. The pleading of the Jews for the Messiah to come and save them is the subject of much revelation. One example is found in Zechariah 12:10-13:1. The pleading of Israel for the Messiah to return will begin with the confession of the national sin, and then they will plead for His return to save them from the troubles ... They plead for the one whom they have pierced. This will be the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

That the remnant comes to a saving knowledge of Jesus the Messiah by way of the fires of the Tribulation is summarized in Zechariah 13:7-9. Verse seven gives the basic reason why the events of the Tribulation will fall on Israel: God's Shepherd, the Messiah, was smitten and so His sheep. Israel, were scattered throughout the world. Toward the latter end of the dispersion will come the Great Tribulation through which two-thirds of the Jewish population will be killed (v. 8). The remaining third will be refined. By mean of the national confession of their sin, they will be purified (v. 9). God will then answer their pleading for Him to come and save them. They will once again be His people, and He will be their God.

... According to Romans 11:25-27, all Israel will be saved. According to Isaiah 10:20-23, only the remnant will be saved. This is not a contradiction if it is understood in the context of Israel's national salvation. As Zechariah 13:8-9 has pointed out, two-thirds of the Jewish population will be destroyed in the persecutions of the Tribulation. This will include the entire non-remnant so that only the remnant will survive, the escaped of Isaiah 4:2; 10:20; 37:31-32; Joel 2:32; and Obadiah 17. Since the remaining one-third becomes believers, at that point all Israel and the remnant of Israel become one and the same, as Micah 2:12-13 makes clear. Hebrew poetry used parallelism and the first parallel is:

*I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel.*

The *all of thee* and *the remnant of Israel* are one and the same for with Israel's national salvation the whole nation now becomes part of the remnant (v. 12). Because of Israel's national salvation, Messiah returns to rescue them (v. 13).” Israelology, The Missing Link In Systematic Theology, by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum Th.M., Ph.D., pgs. 781-789

## Summary

- The Rapture of the Church has no preconditions and can come at any moment.
- The return of Christ has preconditions.

### Who Are The Elect At Matthew 24:31?

*“And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His Elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”*

I recall talking to a former Jehovah’s Witness, now pastor, in the year 2018. While we were attending the Sacramento conference. There was a group of us sitting at a table having a bite to eat, and the Pastor and I began a conversation about the Church going through the Great Tribulation. To my surprise, he told me *the Church* would be going through the event and used Matthew 24:31 as his Scriptural authority. My recollection of this conversation is vivid because of his inflexibility and my ambivalence. I strongly disagreed with his assertions, but we never did follow through with any further discussion because of time constraints. However, I would like to share why I strongly disagreed with his interpretation.

My view that the Body of Christ (aka the Church) will not go through the Great Tribulation is not new. Since Matthew 24 is an end time Chapter and the Great Tribulation is an end time event, we can logically assume that the elect are those living during the end time period. Can we assume, however, that these elect are the Church? Is there any evidence, for or against, that view?

## THE NATURE OF THE TRIBULATION

### **Complete Lack of Evidence for Presence of Church in Tribulation**

“In the previous discussion of the scriptural revelation concerning the Tribulation, it was shown that a careful and literal exegesis of the Scriptures reveals no evidence whatever that the church of the present age will go through the Tribulation. In none of the tribulation passages was any reference found to the church. In the Old Testament the tribulation passages refer to both Israel and the Gentiles and to the saved among either group but never to a corporate body of Jews and Gentiles combined as they are in the church.

Posttribulationists, however, are not willing to concede that the church is a distinct company of people and seize upon the word *elect* as found in Matthew 24:22,31 as evidence that the church is in the Tribulation. Even pretribulationists are somewhat confused on this issue.

Pretribulationists concede and uniformly teach that there will be elect, that is, saved people, in the tribulation time. This fact does not in the slightest prove the these

mentioned in this way belong to the church, the body of Christ. All saved people of all ages as individuals are elect. Israel is also an elect nation, that is, specially chosen to fulfill divine purposes. The question is not whether there are any elect in the Tribulation but whether that portion of the elect that is called the church, the body of Christ, is ever mentioned. As far as this passage is concerned, there is no evidence whatever for the presence of the church in this period.

Special attention is often given to this reference in Matthew 24:31: 'And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.' This has been taken by posttribulationists to prove *ipso facto* that the translation of the church takes place after the Tribulation. MacPherson, cited previously, stated dogmatically, 'There is nothing here to indicate who the elect are, although there is every likelihood the term refers to the Church.' (Norman S. MacPherson, *Triumph Through Tribulation*, p. 8). Reese called it 'supreme rubbish' to question whether the elect as used here is equivalent to the church. He cited the fact that our Lord used the same expression, *elect* or *chosen*, in His parable of the wedding of the king's son. (Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ.*, p. 207) It does not seem comprehensible to Reese that saints in the church and saints who are Israelites or Gentiles before the church can both be elect and still not the same company. Arguing that *elect* in every context must be an all-inclusive term is begging the question.

There are several alternatives to explain the term *elect* in harmony with the pretribulationist interpretation. Some believe that the context points to the limitation of the word *elect* to living saints on the earth at the time of the Second Advent (cf. Matt. 24:22). Others have regarded the word 'elect' in Matthew 24:31 as a reference to Israel as an elect nation. In either case, the passage would teach nothing whatever against the pretribulationist position and would not include the church.

It is possible, however, to harmonize this passage with pretribulationism even if, for the sake of argument, the word *elect* be taken in its widest and most inclusive connotation of all saints of all ages. At the Second Advent, indeed, there is a gathering together of the church from heaven and the Old Testament saints in resurrection along with the elect angels as well as elect in the earth. All elect of all ages converge upon the millennial scene. While Matthew states the elect are gathered 'from one end of the heavens to the other' (Matt. 24:31), Mark includes 'from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heavens' (Mark 13:27). The point is that pretribulationism is not hindered in the slightest by the form of expression that is used here, and posttribulationists are guilty of begging the question by assuming that this passage confirms their position.

A number of considerations make this event quite different from the rapture of the church. The fact is that the church is not mentioned at all in this passage by any distinctive title such as the word *church* or the term *body of Christ* or any other term peculiarly a reference to the church. It is not claimed that this passage proves pretribulationism, but it fails to assert that it does not offer any evidence whatever against it.

The argument of Reese that the gathering of the elect is positive proof that the translation of the saints takes place at this time is another instance of reading into the passage what it does not say. Reese states: "The assertion of Kelly's in his *Second Coming* (pg. 211) that there is no rapture at Matt. xxiv. 31, is as bold as it is unfounded. Our Lord in that passage gave a perfect picture of the assembling of the saved of this Dispensation by means of a rapture; St. Mark even used for 'gathering' the verbal form of the same word used for 'gathering' in 2 Thess. ii, 1, where Paul refers to the Rapture. To unbiased minds the gathering of the saved, or the Elect, in Matt. xxiv. 31, is a prototype of Paul's teaching in 1 Thess. iv. 16-17, and 2 Thess. ii 1'. (First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, chap. 23).

The logical fallacy of this statement should be apparent. Reese argued because there is a gathering at the translation that therefore every mention of a gathering must be the same event.

The truth is that there will be a gathering of the church, the body of Christ, at the translation, before the Tribulation. There will also be a gathering after the Tribulation which will be more inclusive. Matthew says nothing about a translation, and the idea of translation is foreign to any passage dealing with the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom. There will be no translation then, though there will be a resurrection of righteous dead. Matthew 24:31 says nothing about the resurrection either. It should be clear that Matthew's revelation deals with the gathering of the elect as an event subsequent to all that has gone before.

The extended treatment of the tribulation period in Revelation 4-18 supports the idea that the church is nowhere found in the Tribulation. Again, familiar terms such as *Israel* and *saints* are found, but no reference to the church is made in any of the tribulation passages. After the exhortations to the historic seven churches of Asia in chapters 2 and 3, the church is not in view on earth again until Revelation 19, in connection with the second coming of Christ. The absolute silence of Scripture on the church being in the Tribulation, while not in itself conclusive, is certainly in line with the possibility that the church may be translated before the Tribulation begins. How strange it would be in such a tremendous movement of events as will take place in the tribulation time if no mention of the church as such would appear if, as a matter of fact, the church is actually in the period and enduring its trials!" The Rapture Question, by John F. Walvoord, pgs. 59-62.

## **TWO GROUPS WITH TWO DIFFERENT APPOINTMENTS**

"God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). Paul was saying expressly that our appointment is to be caught up to be with Christ; the appointment of the world is for the day of the Lord, the day of wrath. One cannot keep both appointments. We make our appointment for salvation and the rapture when we trust Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. Certainly after the church is raptured, some in the tribulation will turn to Christ, and Revelation 7:9-10 states that there will be an innumerable company of martyrs. Many will be saved after the church has gone to heaven, but they will experience the awfulness of that period. As

the wrath of God is poured upon the earth, it will involve them too". 1 & 2 Thessalonians, by John F. Walvoord and Mark Hitchcock, pgs. 94-95.

### ***The Last Twenty Years***

“In the last twenty years, Israel has continued to occupy the center of the stage in the Middle East, and the importance of contemporary events relating to fulfillment of the prophecy has become increasingly more apparent. If the current events indicate that the end of the age is approaching, the question as to whether the church is to be raptured before end-time events are fulfilled becomes more important than ever.” The Rapture Question, by John F. Walvoord, pg. 7.

With everything we have already considered, I believe the assumption that Matthew 24:31 is referring to the Church has been categorically debunked. However, if there is any doubt, there is one more important passage of Scripture which “*slam-dunks*” that narrative. To prove the Body of Christ will not go through the Great Tribulation, we must listen to God. As always, Scripture is my absolute authority, and it usurps all contrived and man-made opinions and positions. Therefore, I would like to turn your attention to the book of Revelation Chapter 7.

To set the stage, the Apostle John has seen and heard things going on in heaven: *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God.”* (verses 9-12)

The Apostle John is an eyewitness to these events, and what is significant is what John does not see. You can read the entire Chapter for an overall perspective, but I will concentrate on verses 13-15: *“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?’ I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.’”*

Because I just love Dr. J. Vernon McGee’s way of explaining things, this is what he says about this passage:

“This is a very enlightening passage of Scripture. One of the elders went over to John and said, ‘John, who are these believers here arrayed in the white robes?’ And John said, ‘My lord, thou knowest.’ This is an idiomatic expression, and I think we have one like it in our day. When someone asks us a question and we don’t know the answer, we just sort of lift up our hands and say, ‘Search me!’ which means, ‘I don’t know!’ This is exactly what John is saying here: ‘You know that I don’t know. You tell me because I don’t know.’

‘And he said to me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation.’ If these people gathered here were the church, John would have known it. John wrote to the

believers in his day. He knew about the church, he knew about the body of believers, and he wrote to them about love, that great unifying cement that holds them together. *But John doesn't know who this company is.* The elder who is a representative of the church now in heaven, knows that this company is not the church. It is an altogether different company. It is those who came out of the Great Tribulation. Doesn't that tell you that the church is not going through the Great Tribulation? This is a special company, out of all tribes and tongues and nations, who have come out of the Great Tribulation.

We live in a day when God makes a division in the human family. One division is between the saved and the lost, of course — that is the great bifurcation of the human family. But if you want a racial division or a group division of the human family, the Word of God has something to say about it: 'Give no offense, neither either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). Paul says to the Corinthians there are three groups — the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God — and they are not to give offense to any one of these groups. This is one of the divisions that the Scripture makes of the human family. The Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God comprise the division that runs right down through the human family today. In the Great Tribulation, we come to a period when there are but two groups: Jews and Gentiles. Where is the church of God? It went to be with Him. The Lord Jesus said, '... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ...' (John 14:2-3). The church is with Him in heaven as we move through the Revelation. In I Corinthians 12:13 Paul says: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.' God today is calling out of the two divisions, both Jews and Gentiles, a people for His name that are different — the church — and that church will be taken out of the world." Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, pgs. 955-956.

What bewilders me about those who hold to the idea that the Body of Christ goes through the Great Tribulation is their complete lack of Scriptural support. Not only is Scripture silent about the Church going through the Tribulation, but these people also ignore the fact that John failed to recognize the tribulation saints in heaven. John was able to identify the Church in heaven but was unable to identify this other company of people — those who accepted Christ during that time and went straight to heaven when they died — the Tribulation Saints who are the "elect" of Matthew 24:31. To be blunt, this is what happens when pushing a narrative becomes paramount to pushing Scriptural truths.

### **Below are some highlights:**

- 1Thessalonians 5:9 reads, "*For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Wrath, i.e., the anguish and tribulation associated with the beginning of the Day of the Lord (v. 3), from which the believer is to be delivered (1:10).
- None of the tribulation passages reference the Church.
- There is absolutely no Scriptural authority pointing to the "elect" of Matthew 24:31 as referring to the Church.
- The word elect is given to all saints in all ages.

- The Apostle John saw the Church in heaven, but did not recognize the other company in heaven. He was told by the elder that these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation. In other words, they accepted Christ during that time, died, and are now in heaven. Because the Tribulation Age produces Tribulation saints, Matthew 24:31 rightly identifies them as the “elect.”

## **ARTICLE SUMMARY**

- (1) The Literal Method of biblical interpretation is the safest and most reliable.
- (2) Advocating The Invisible Return of Jesus Christ in 1914 or A.D. 70 Lacks Biblical Support.
- (3) The “Gentile Times” Continue To Run In Our 21st Century, Proving a Future Fulfillment.
- (4) The Appearance of the “Abomination Of Desolation” Will Signal the Great Tribulation.
- (5) The Word “Elect” Refers To All Saints of All Ages.
- (6) The “Nation” of Israel Will Accept Christ As Their Messiah During the Great Tribulation.
- (7) Three Distinct Groups Found In Scripture; Jews, Gentiles, and the Church.
- (8) Jesus Christ Will Literally Reign As King On Earth For One Thousand Years.
- (9) The Great Tribulation Will Kill Billions of People.

## **Final Thoughts**

Examining Scriptural texts and prophecies through the lens of a literal method of interpretation allows transparency to shine through. Using this method has a two-fold advantage — one can more fully understand what is being said, and it prevents misinterpretation. It also protects us from being misled by Satan and his false Bible teachers and their unscrupulous methods of cult control. It is by far the safest and most accurate approach to the understanding of prophecy and the Bible as a whole.

I do hope and pray that my article answers questions that you may have had, or perhaps sheds light on things you’ve never thought of. Prophecy is an exciting and educational quest. It is God’s way of telling us what will happen in future times. God has already provided us the answers — how man-made world governments will end. God wins, Satan loses. Trusting in God means we live without fear, so relax. As we walk the Christian life, let us never forget to heed the words of Christ: “*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.*” (Matthew 10:16).

Your Brother in Christ,  
Cochise